

'We did it our way' ... university is not the only route to take to land that dream job

First Minister Carwyn Jones this week congratulated Welsh students on achieving the nation's best-ever GCSE results. But as the true value of post-16 education comes under scrutiny, youngsters up and down the country will be weighing up their options. Here, Education Wales catches up with six workers who each chose different paths to success



■ Rachel McCarthy has started work in the University of Glamorgan's marketing team

RACHEL MCCARTHY
CAERPHILLY, 21

GRADUATE Rachel McCarthy was snapped up by her university marketing team after completing her studies this summer.

The 21-year-old gained first-class honours in marketing and has already started work in the University of Glamorgan's schools team, raising the profile of one of

Wales' biggest higher education institutions.

Rachel said: "I was delighted to get the job at Glamorgan. I had a great experience here as a student and it's a real buzz to be telling other people about the opportunities the university offers."

"Working in the team has shown me first-hand that the skills I learned in my degree are exactly what

employers are looking for."

Competition for graduate jobs is growing every year and Tom Hay, student recruitment and events manager at the University of Glamorgan, said: "Interviews for jobs in the marketing world are incredibly competitive and we had dozens of applicants for the post. Rachel really shone, and we were pleased to welcome her to the team."

HEIDI FARLEIGH
CARDIFF, 22

HUMAN resource assistant Heidi Farleigh is 22 and debt-free.

After completing A-levels in psychology, English language and literature and religious philosophy, she joined Fresh-baked Business Services Group as a receptionist.

She quickly turned to the world of human resources and this year realised her dream of promotion to the company's

HR department. She said: "My aim is to become a HR manager for a business, so I feel I am now on track to achieve this. A lot of my friends went to university and have come out and are now looking for work."

"I am pleased with my decision to start employment straight from school as I now feel extremely lucky to be in the position I am in - aged 22, in my dream job and totally debt-free."

LEWIS BURNETT
NEWBRIDGE, 17

DETERMINED to beat the economic downturn, Gwent teenager Lewis Burnett decided to earn money while he learnt.

Training provider ACT organised a work placement at Newport-based B2 from Beachcroft solicitors, as part of his NVQ Level 2 in business administration.

But having made a good impression on his employer, the 17-year-old was quickly offered a permanent job as a claims handler.

Wales' largest work-based learning provider, ACT provides training opportunities to people who are both employed and out of work.

The company has centres in Risca, Cardiff, Bridgend and Caerphilly.

Lewis is growing in confidence and feels he is racing ahead of his peers in terms of career progression.

His work ethic and enthusiasm has made a great impression on his employers, and he works on a large portfolio of clients from across the UK.

Lewis, who hopes to run his own business one day, said: "I'm from a family of entrepreneurs so wanting to work and earn money is in my blood."

"Thanks to my employer and ACT, I feel like I'm getting the best of both worlds - earning money and achieving qualifications."

"I know that there are thousands of people my age out of work at the moment, and I really didn't want to become one of them."

Paul Short, motor outsource manager at B2 from Beachcroft, said: "Employing a person who is so young is a gamble for any employer, but I can confidently say that we have been very fortunate in recruiting Lewis."

"He is an extremely motivated and hard-working individual and the training that he has been receiving from ACT has really helped his development, which has ultimately benefited the company."

Lewis works at B2 from Beachcroft solicitors five days a week and trains at ACT in Cardiff once a month.



■ Lewis Burnett

KRIS POWELL
PONTYPRIDD, 19

TRAINEE accountant Kris Powell left Pontypridd High School to join Clay Shaw Thomas.

After a successful work experience placement in 2007, the then 16-year-old decided to learn from his elders in a professional environment.

"This was a great opportunity

to get commercial experience on a range of different businesses and give me some money in my pocket," he said.

A sound set of GCSE results ensured the offer of a job, and Kris has not looked back since.

"I continued to ignore advice from my friends to study for A-levels and the traditional graduate route, however at home

I have always had support to follow my gut instincts."

Kris studied an NVQ in accounting at Bridgend College for NVQ, but enhanced experience in the workplace enabled him to progress faster than expected.

He achieved his NVQ Level 4 in March and now has full membership of the Association of Accounting Technicians.

the driver was off on holiday."

James has since worked his way up to front well-known supplier Complete Office Solutions Group in Barry. "People shouldn't turn their noses up at the opportunity of working for a family business," he said.

"Since taking on the role as managing director, I have diversified the company's offering into promotional products,

interior design and renewable energy. I have also recently launched a music management company in a bid to support young and aspiring musicians in the Vale of Glamorgan."

"I set up Seren*e Management, named after my daughter Katie Seren, having uncovered a number of unique, talented songwriters and performers from across South Wales."

"I now have been working for three years and am currently studying for the Chartered Accountancy qualification."

"If I achieve first-time passes in my exams, I will be qualified by age 21 and will also have the benefit of five years' commercial experience of helping people run their businesses."

"Within Clay Shaw Thomas I

have colleagues who have taken the same route and some that have followed the traditional graduate route. Ultimately, we all benefit from our different experiences."

"My choice, I believe, has given me faster career progression, wider experience of dealing with people and I have a good balance in my work and social life."

JULI HARRIS
RHONDDA CYNON TAF,
28

A **UNIVERSITY** degree is not the only key to landing your dream job, as Juli Harris proved.

After sitting her GCSEs, she left school at 16 to enrol on an engineering apprenticeship and has recently landed a job with one of the UK's leading recruitment and training agencies.

Juli said: "It was my choice not to return to school or college to study for A-levels. I did well in my GCSEs - I got two As, five Bs and three Cs, but because I wanted to 'do engineering, it seemed much more productive to do an apprenticeship where I would be learning actual skills."

Juli completed an NVQ Level 2 in engineering manufacture at Milton Keynes Technical College, as well as a BTEC at automotive engineering company, Cosworth.

During her apprenticeship, Juli was placed in different areas of the company and, after spending time in the marketing and communications department, decided that was the area in which she wanted to progress.

"I really enjoyed working in the marketing department at Cosworth, and was lucky enough to get a job after I finished my training," she said.

"Unfortunately, I was made redundant a few months later, and I soon realised I was unlikely to get another job in marketing without any relevant qualifications."

Juli got in touch with the University of Northampton, and despite not having the usual entry qualifications, they took into account her relevant experience and she was accepted onto the institution's marketing degree course.

Juli now plans to study for a diploma in marketing from the Chartered Institute of Marketing, while enjoying her new role as marketing executive for Acorn.

Helena Williams, of Acorn's learning and development division, said: "Deciding against the traditional route of A-levels meant Juli was able to experience the working environment and discover what it was she wanted to do with her life."

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